

Note from *people and places*: this volunteer's placement was designed specifically for them – they went through our full matching process, as we've been doing with you. The placement report indicates their particular skills and experience – yours may be similar or completely different – your own placement will make best use of **your** experience and skills. Every volunteer is different – in what they give and what they gain. Reports from previous volunteers serve to give you as good a picture as possible about the project.

If you have any questions about any of the detail in this report please do not hesitate to contact me at kate@travel-peopleandplaces.co.uk

Yvonne Brown - Tshume Primary School, Kwa Zakhele, Port Elizabeth
2 November – 31 November 2010

*1. Note from **people and places**: in September 2010, all SA public sector workers were on strike. This caused delays and disruption in the detailed planning of all November schools placements, but all volunteers were kept fully informed throughout their preparation time. Educators were even under more pressure than usual when they returned to work in October to prepare for the November end of year exams. This helps to explain various comments and observations in this report.*

I found previous volunteers' reports very useful especially the one from Susan who had been in the reception class at Tshume earlier in the year. Once I knew that I was in the same class we communicated via email and I was able to build up a picture of what would be useful to take and ideas for activities in the class.

As my brief was 'learning through play' I was very happy and excited and had lots of ideas as I had been helping at my grandson's nursery each morning for about a month. The teachers there were very helpful and full of enthusiasm for me. (A previous volunteer had commented that she wished that she had done some work in a nursery and I would certainly recommend this.) The children at the nursery actually painted pictures for me to take with me – they accompanied the song 'God made the sun' which both the children in England and South Africa sing. The children at Tshume loved them.

There was no orientation as such at the school. (*see note 1. above*) I was introduced to Dombi the reception teacher and for the first couple of days I observed and helped when and where appropriate. As I expected, even in the first day or so the children did 'try it on' a bit. The first time was a bit difficult as their understanding of English is very limited but I soon found out what to do. I had taken some large colourful story books and song books with me which were very useful for group reading and singing. I had also taken two puppet sets – Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs and Goldilocks and the Three Bears. They were so enthusiastic wanting to play with the puppets that I use to take a different group each day into the library so that they could all have a turn.

I bought essentials for the class like blue tak, pritt sticks, crayons, map pins etc and some extras – playdoh and cutters.

*Note from **people and places**: such items identified as being useful for the placement can be purchased, in agreement with the school and local project management team, from the ring-fenced amount paid by volunteers as their project donation.*

I'd also taken with me some jigsaws and books which my grandchildren had outgrown. With these extra resources at 'activity time' we were able to put different things out and work in smaller groups. This worked well as the children were so eager to learn and to try different activities. I would put the activities out on different tables and let the children choose and move about between the tables.

I think that I had an excellent placement, both the children and the teacher were a joy to work with.

I think that it is a bad time of the school year to send volunteers into a school because of the exams. The exams didn't affect the reception class directly and for the first two weeks most of the children attended but during the last week of my placement the numbers were reduced dramatically – the lowest being six. On this particular day there was only two other children in the whole school! *(see note 1. above)*

I went into this thinking that I would be 'an extra pair of hands' to help the teacher. This proved to be the case. Dombi and I worked well together and we were able to help the children in smaller groups and give them more individual attention.

note: this is how we ask that volunteers work: together with local people, rather than instead of them!

The reception class were having their graduation ceremony on my last day and had to perform three items. I had taken some animal masks to make and suggested that the children could perform 'Noah's Ark' (the animals went in 2 by 2). This we did and decorated the ark with the children's drawings and cutouts.

We taught the children 'Away in a Manger' and we had a Mary and Joseph and the children made crowns for the three kings.

Dombi was more than happy to let me do more or less what I wanted with the children. Before I went I had in mind activities for a different theme each week – puppets, animals, Christmas. These all worked well but we had the addition of preparing for the graduation and with the dwindling number of children attending we started to run out of time towards the end. The children loved the Christmas activities – we made Christmas cards and the glitter was everywhere! When I arrived none of the children's work was displayed on the walls so during the last week we decorated the classroom with their Christmas work. Both the children and their parents were so proud to see their work on the walls.

For my part, my placement was a total success. I thoroughly enjoyed every minute with the children and I am sure that they enjoyed the extra attention they received. We had lots of fun and laughter and their smiling little faces will be with me forever.

On arrival back at the hotel in the afternoon I would either go for a swim or walk up to Summerstrand for supplies for school or to print photos. At weekend we went on the tourist trips to the game parks, craft market, to a shabeen and also a trip on the Apple Express Train.

In conclusion I would like to thank you for giving me this marvellous experience. The organisation was brilliant and I felt fully prepared when I arrived (but naturally still a little apprehensive). Wherever you are in the world, whatever difficulties they are enduring, all children love to play and the children at Tshume certainly loved to do this!

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